



BNC RESEARCH

Deep Dive: The Science Fiction Book Buyer

2016



BOOKNET
CANADA

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The Science Fiction Book Buyer

About BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series

BookNet Canada's Deep Dive Series takes an in-depth look at some of the biggest genres selling in Canada. The goal is for readers of these reports to have both an overview of sales patterns within the genre and a better understanding of the genre buyers themselves.

Data for these reports have been obtained through two primary sources:

- BookNet Canada's SalesData – representing approximately 85% of the trade market in Canada, SalesData tracks the weekly sale of print books across the country.
- BookNet Canada's Consumer Research – adult book-buying Canadians participate in online surveys about their book purchases from the prior month. Book buyers report on such information as what they purchased, where they made the purchase, what influenced their purchase, and other quantitative data. Buyers were surveyed from the beginning of 2015 to the fall of 2016. The data represents 213 Science Fiction book buyers representing 268 book purchases.

Data for this survey focuses on both books purchased by adults and, when reviewing sales trends, the sale of adult titles.

Overview of the Science Fiction Book Buyer

In December 2016, the *Los Angeles Review of Books* wrote “is there any branch of literature so insecure, so uncertain of its own status as science fiction?” Arguing that “science fiction goes to extraordinary lengths to convince itself, and anyone else who might be paying attention, of its own worth,” the article states that Science Fiction is not well defined¹.

BBC Future concurs as it discusses how to define sci-fi movies: “trying to usefully define it is harder than explaining how a flux capacitor works. It’s a bit like attempting to describe a table to an alien: we all know what one is, but since it can be all sorts of different shapes and sizes, made of many different materials, may or may not have one or more legs and has multiple uses, how do you unambiguously convey what a table is so the alien would always identify it correctly?”²

At the end of this study, you will see a list of top-selling titles that reflect the rich offerings of the Science Fiction genre – from Isaac Asimov to Ian Doescher’s *William Shakespeare’s Star Wars*. For the purposes of this study, we are lucky that we get to rely on the vast knowledge of our publisher friends as they define and classify their works of Science Fiction. Regardless of the scope, Science Fiction represents passionate readers whose purchases represented almost 1% of all book sales in Canada in 2016 and 4.1% of Fiction sales. Science Fiction is slightly smaller than its Fantasy counterpart, which represented 1.3% of all book sales in Canada in 2016.

So, who buys Science Fiction books? The average Science Fiction book buyer is:

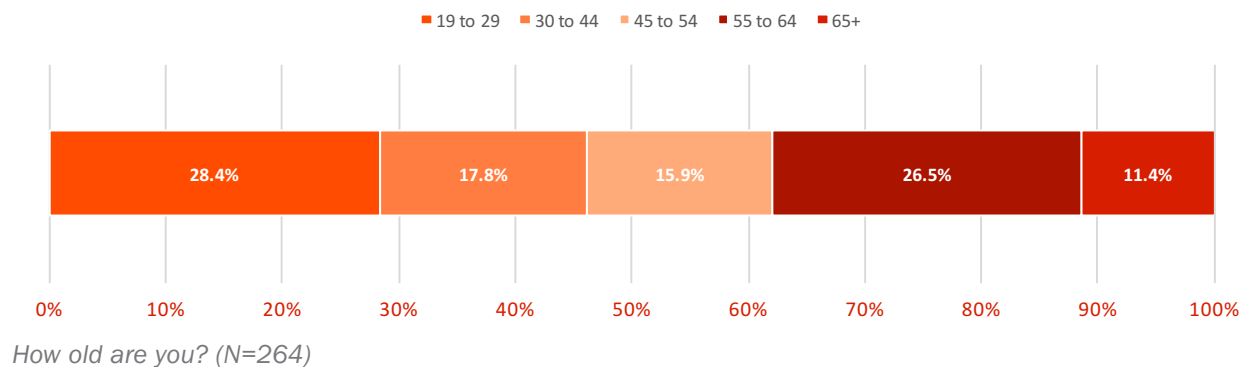
- male (60.7%);
- 44 years old;
- married (39.9%), though single is a close second (36.8%);
- has a university degree; and,
- more likely to reside in Western Canada (10.8%), least likely to reside in the Maritimes (6.3%).

Science Fiction seems to appeal to book buyers of all ages; purchases are fairly evenly spread out amongst the age brackets with 28% purchased by buyers between the ages of 19 and 29 and 27% purchased by those 55 to 64. The graph below takes into account all tracked Science Fiction book purchases, so the age brackets that purchase in higher volume are more heavily represented.

¹ Kincaid, Paul. “This is Science Fiction?” <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/this-is-science-fiction/> December 3, 2016.

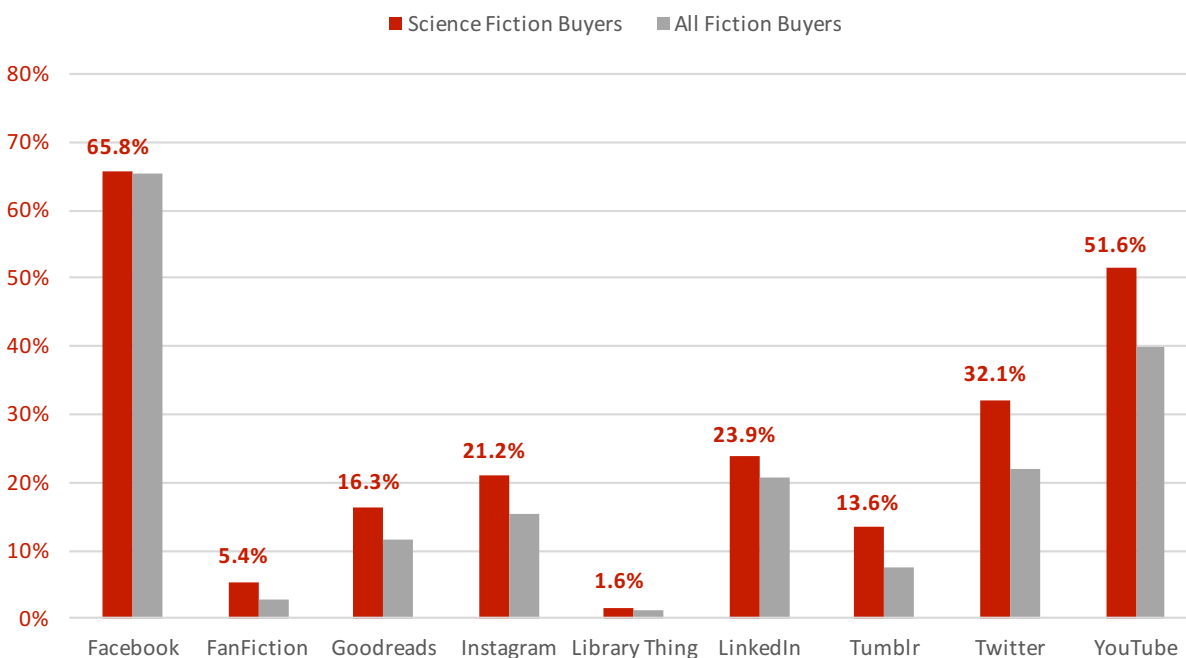
² Cooper, Quentin. “Why is science fiction so hard to define?” <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140729-what-is-and-isnt-sci-fi> July 30, 2014.

Science Fiction Purchases by Buyer's Age



Given that Science Fiction is often characterized by its focus on futuristic science and technology, it likely won't come as a surprise that Science Fiction buyers tend to be more involved with online technology like social media than the average Fiction buyer, particularly when it comes to their use of YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram.

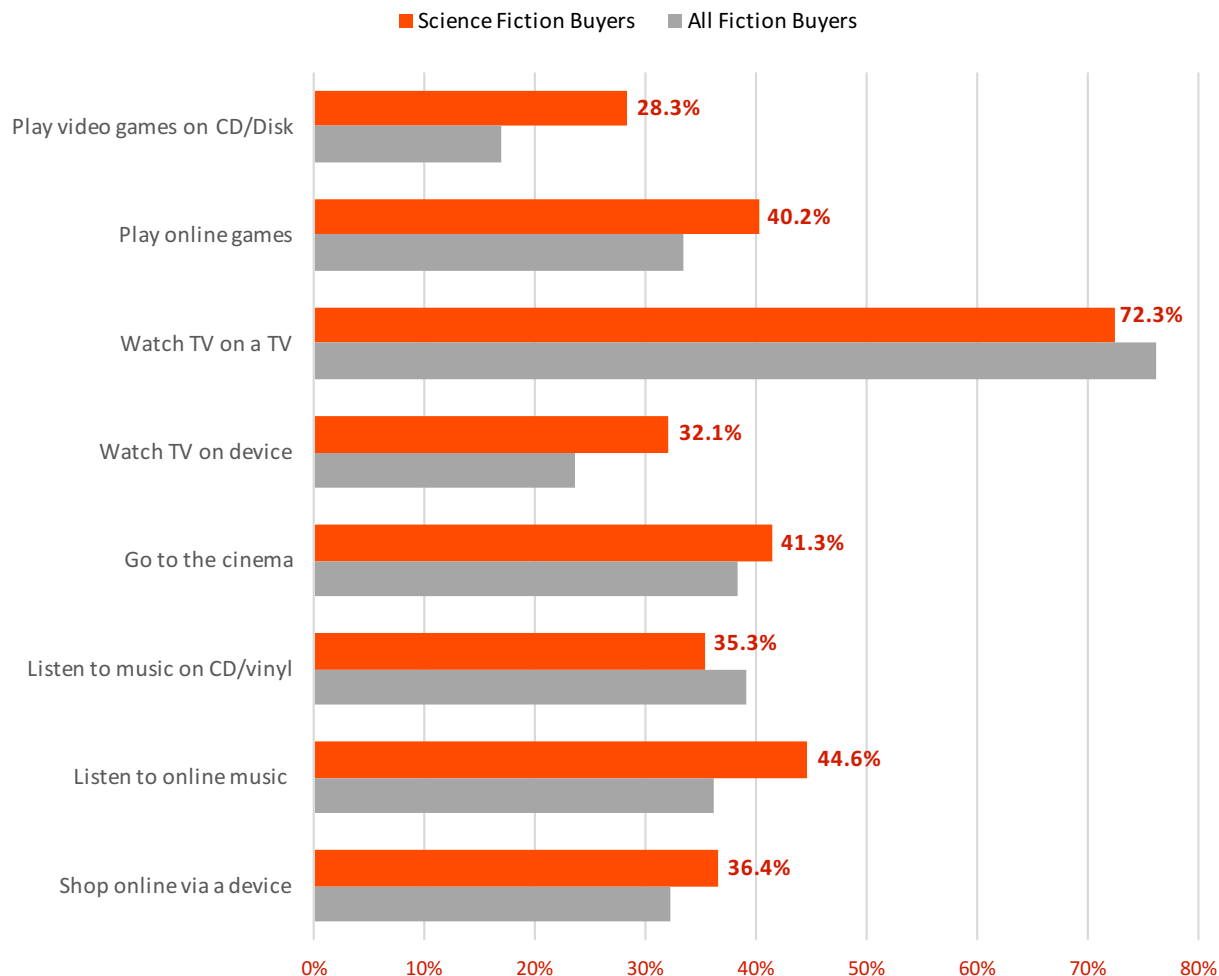
Use of Social Networks



In which of the following social networks, communities, or sharing sites do you currently participate? (N=184, N=1,822)

Again, Science Fiction buyers tend to be more engaged with technology overall. They far outstrip the average Fiction buyer when it comes to playing video and online games, watching TV on a device, and listening to online music. Similarly, they score lower on watching TV on a TV and listening to music on CD/vinyl.

Activities Participated in Monthly

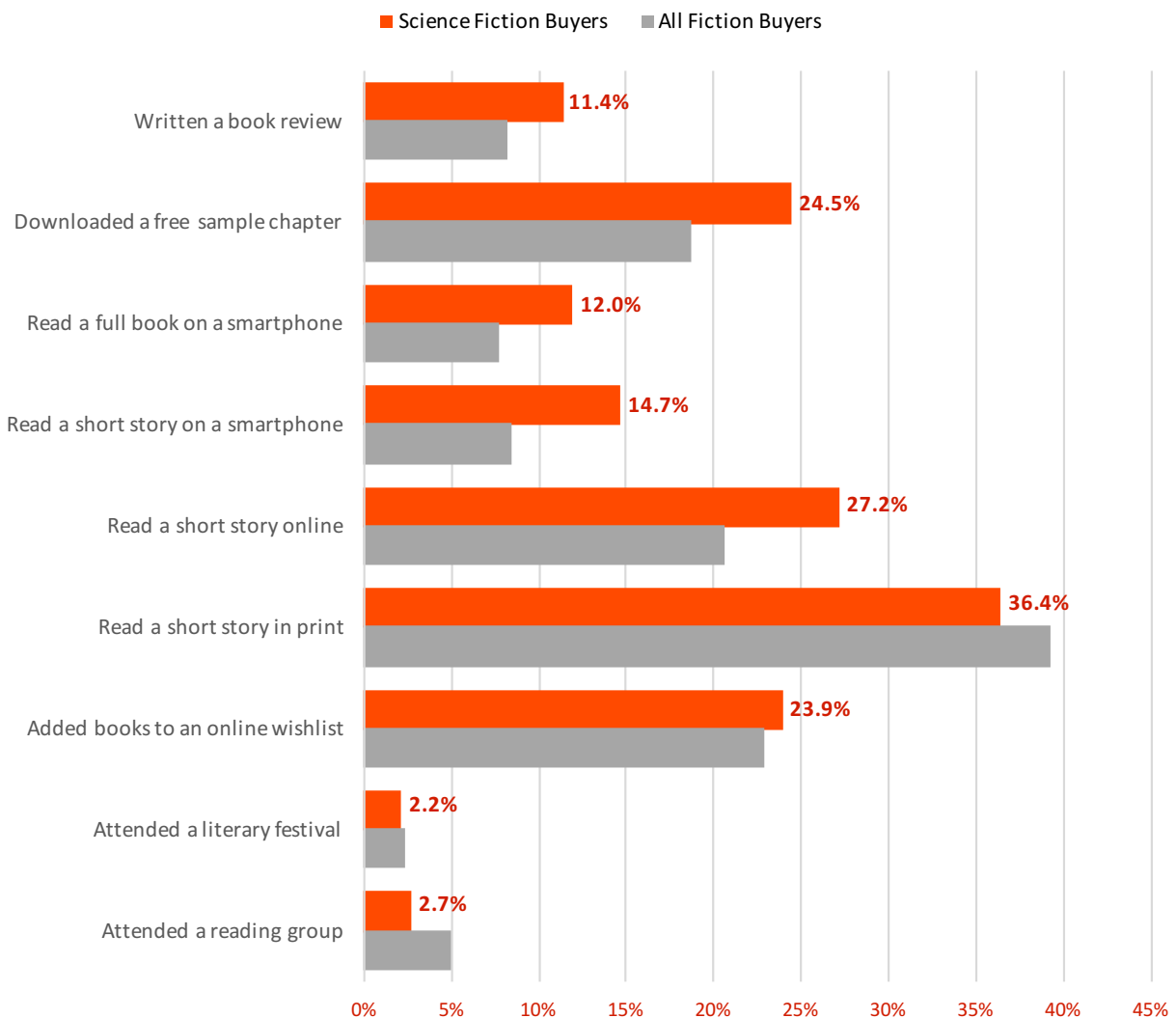


Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (N=184, N=2,256)

Making sample chapters available online is advisable for Science Fiction titles; 24.5% of Science Fiction buyers downloaded a sample chapter in the prior 12 months. This is notably higher than for the average Fiction buyer (18.7%).

Science Fiction buyers are also more inclined than Fiction buyers overall to read short stories on their phone (14.7%) or online (27.2%).

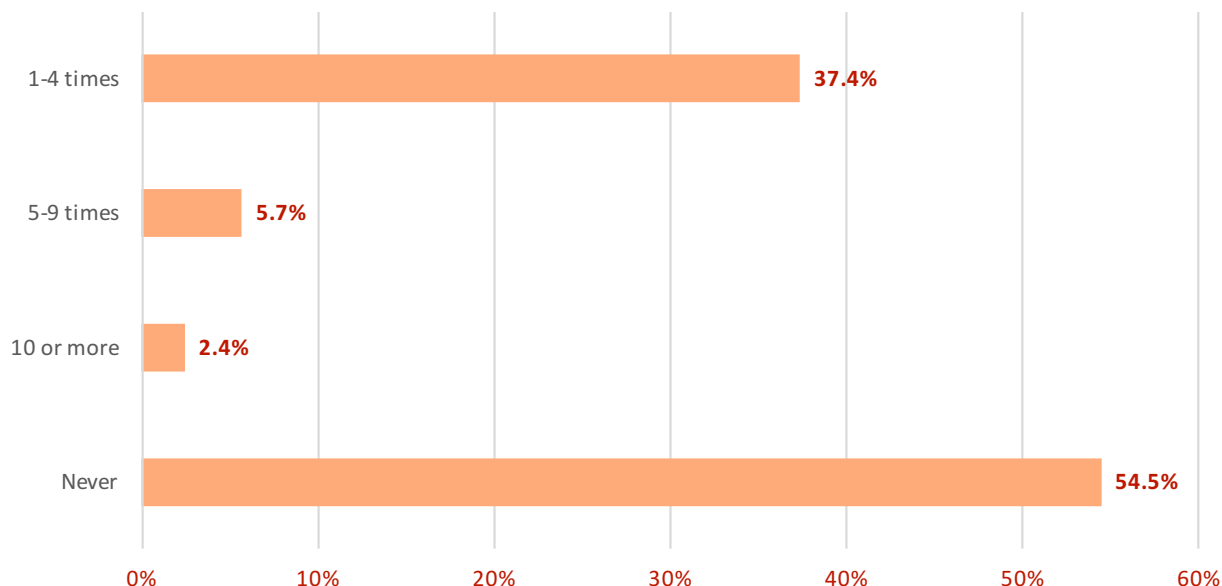
Activities in Last 12 Months



Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months? (N=184, N=1,822)

When compared against the other subjects reviewed for the Deep Dive series, Science Fiction buyers appear to be fairly average library users: 46% have used the library, either in person or online, in the prior month with 8.1% using the library five or more times.

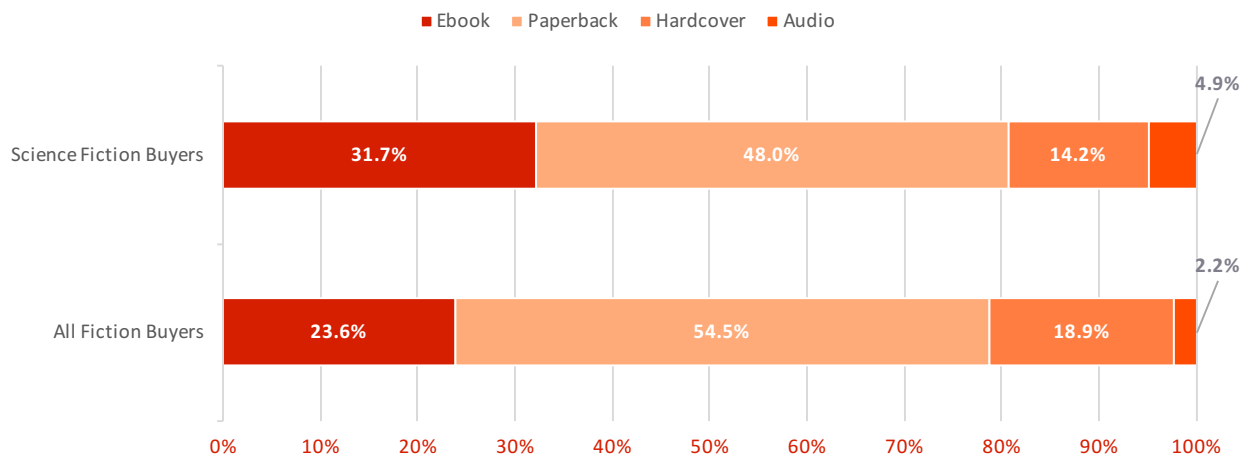
Use of Public Library



How many times have you visited the public library (online or in person) in the last month? (N=246)

Both ebook (31.7%) and audiobook (4.9%) use is notably higher with Science Fiction buyers than it is with overall Fiction buyers. Interestingly, paperback use is slightly lower compared to their general Fiction counterparts.

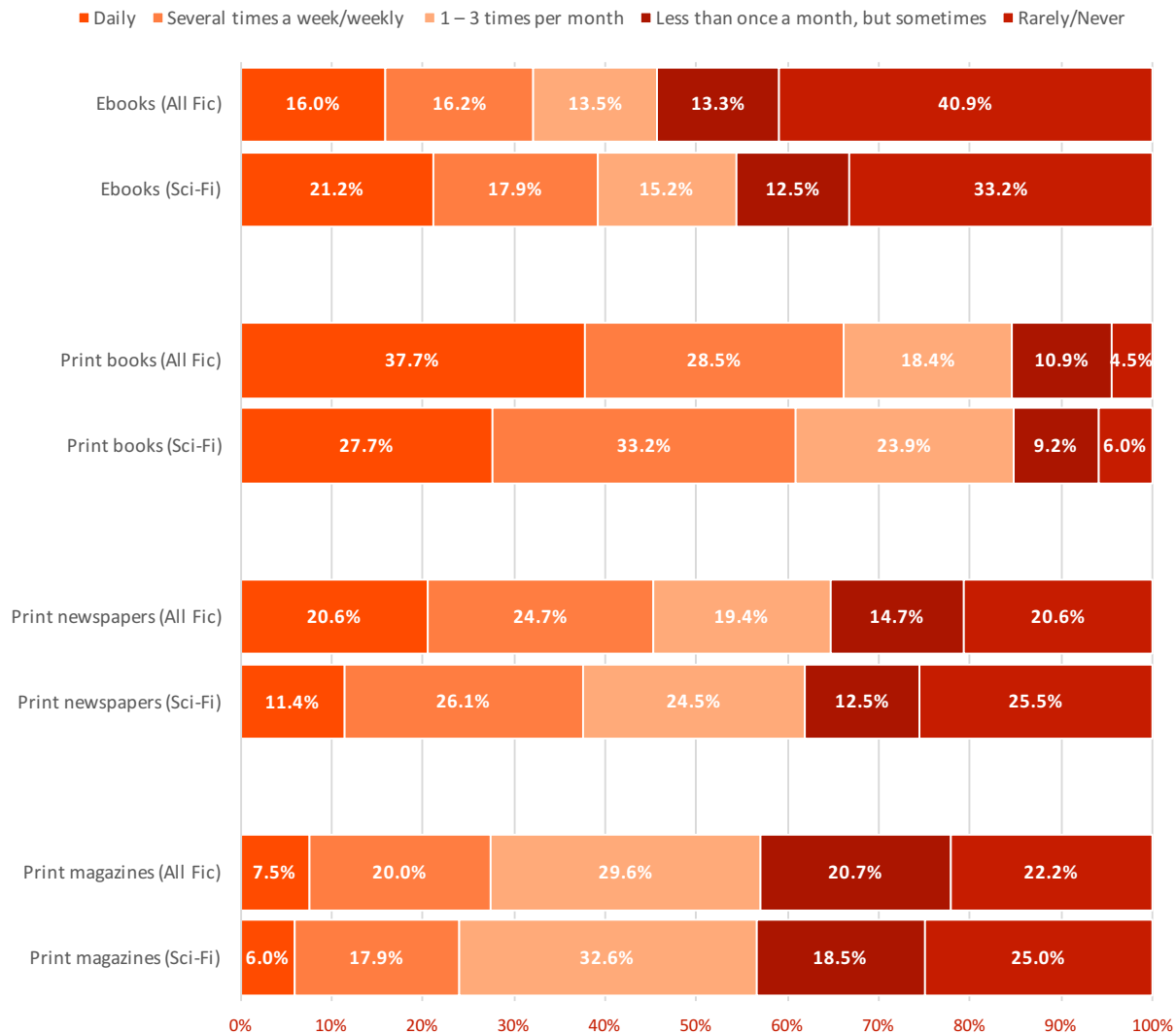
Format Distribution



What format is the book you purchased? (N=246, N=3,519)

The graph below looks not at whether Science Fiction buyers participate in specific activities but rather the frequency at which they participate. The tendency towards digital continues with Science Fiction buyers being more inclined than the average Fiction reader to read digitally: 54.3% of Science Fiction buyers read digitally either daily, weekly, or monthly as compared to 45.7% of Fiction buyers overall.

Reading Frequency



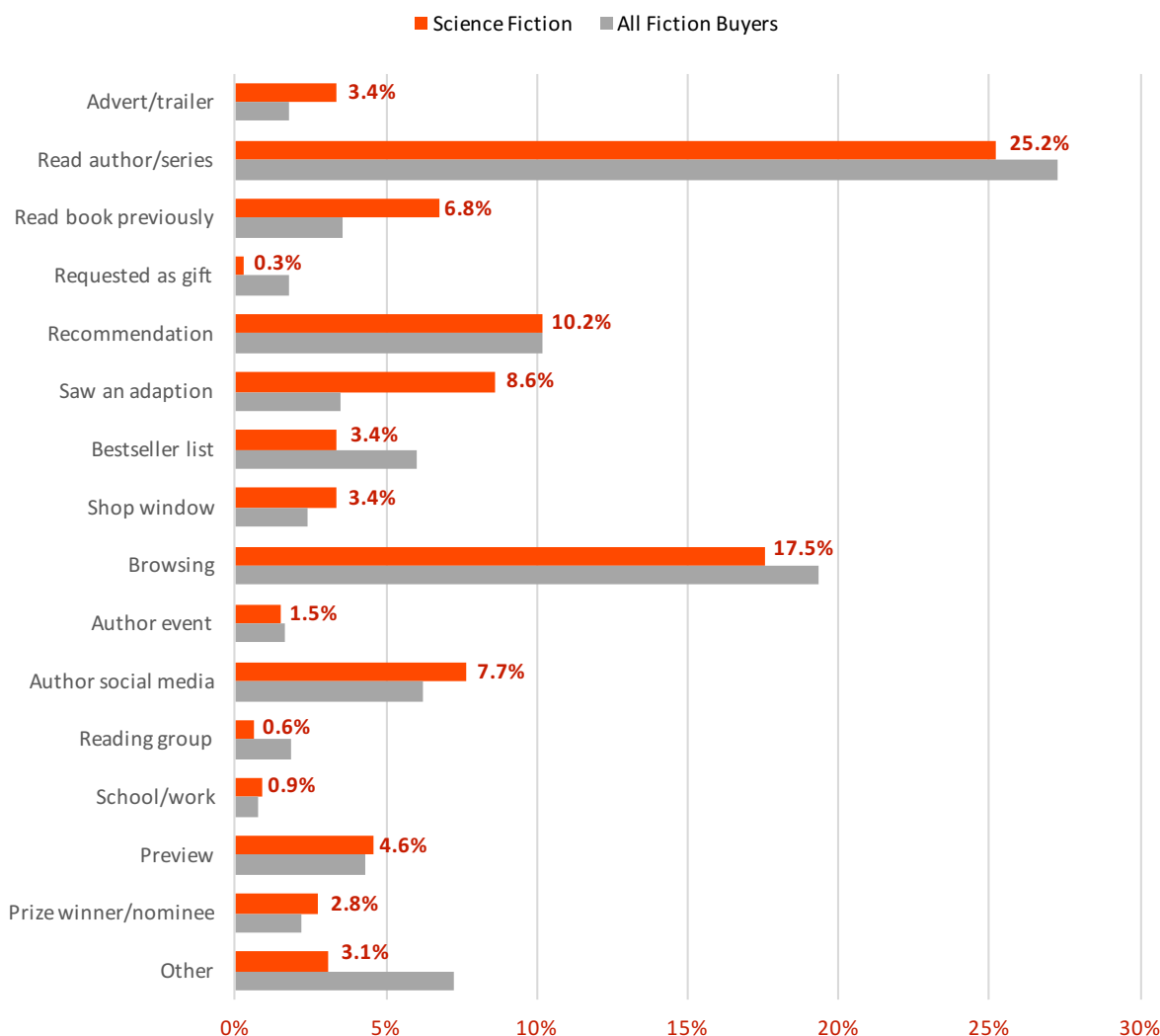
How often do you engage in the following activities? (N=2,556, N=184)

Discoverability and Decision to Buy

Book awareness is one of those all-important marketing questions: how are people finding out about your books? For Science Fiction book buyers, social media is popular at 7.7%. Buying after seeing an adaptation also ranked very high at 8.6%, as compared to only 3.5% for the average Fiction buyer.

A surprising 6.8% of Science Fiction buyers said they had read the book previously; this is almost double what we find for the average Fiction buyer (3.5%). We also find that use of advertisements or trailers rank notably higher with Science Fiction buyers (3.4%), along with previews (4.6%), and having won or been nominated for a prize (2.8%).

Awareness

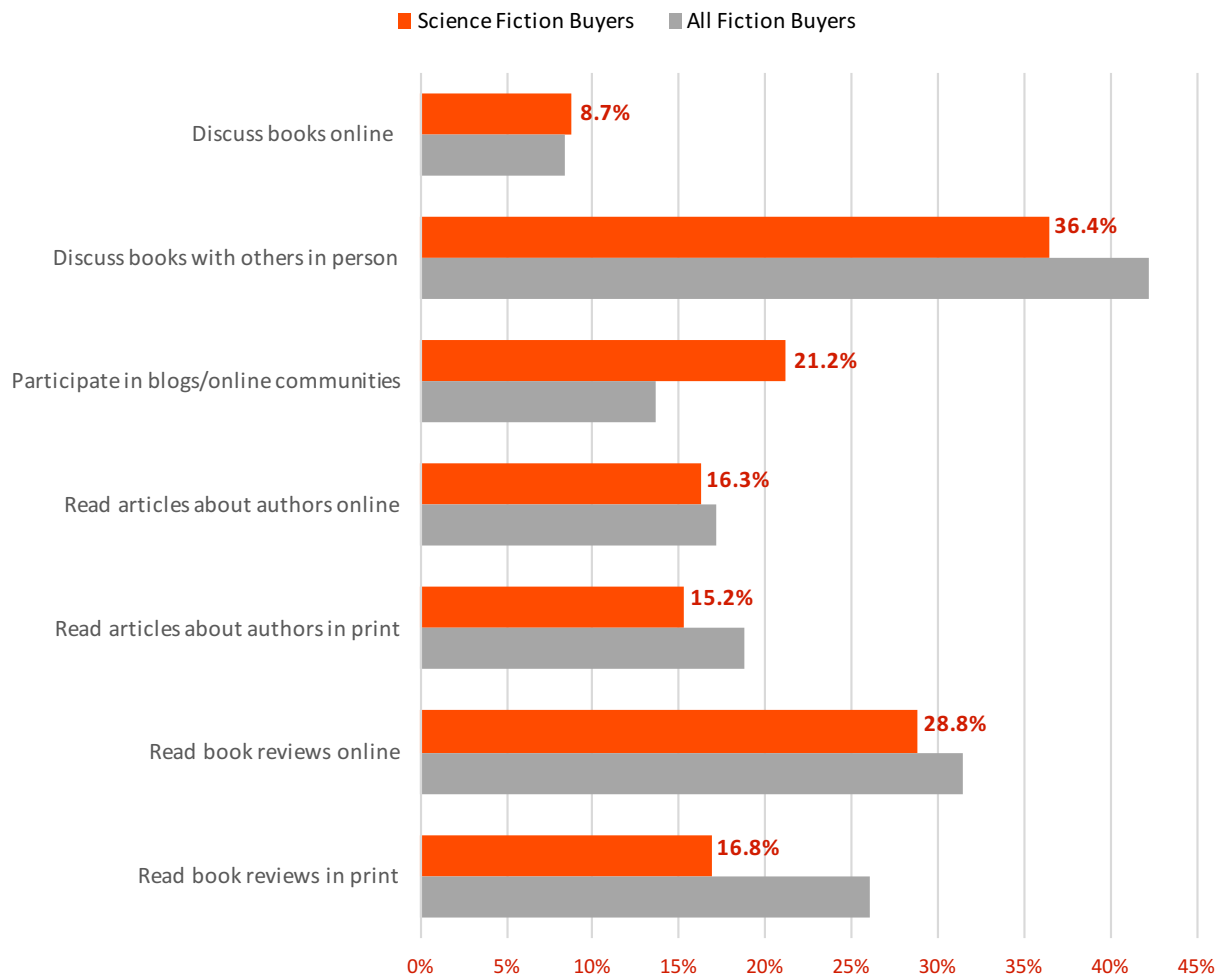


How did you become aware of this book? (N=325, N=4,452)

Science Fiction buyers prefer to talk to others online much more than in person; 21.2% participate in blogs or online communities, significantly more than Fiction buyers in general. Meanwhile, 36.4% of Science Fiction buyers discuss books in person with other people, which is a lot, but it's still less than the average Fiction buyer at 42.2%.

Book reviews, both online and in print, don't resonate with Science Fiction buyers.

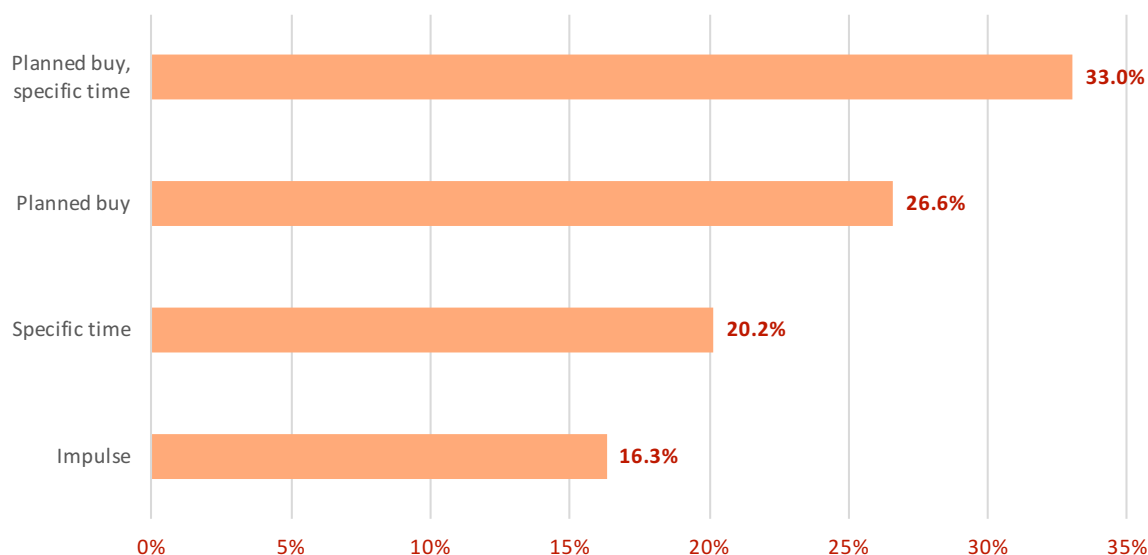
Book-Related Activities Participated in During Prior Month



Which of the following activities do you do at least once in a typical month? (N=184, N=2,256)

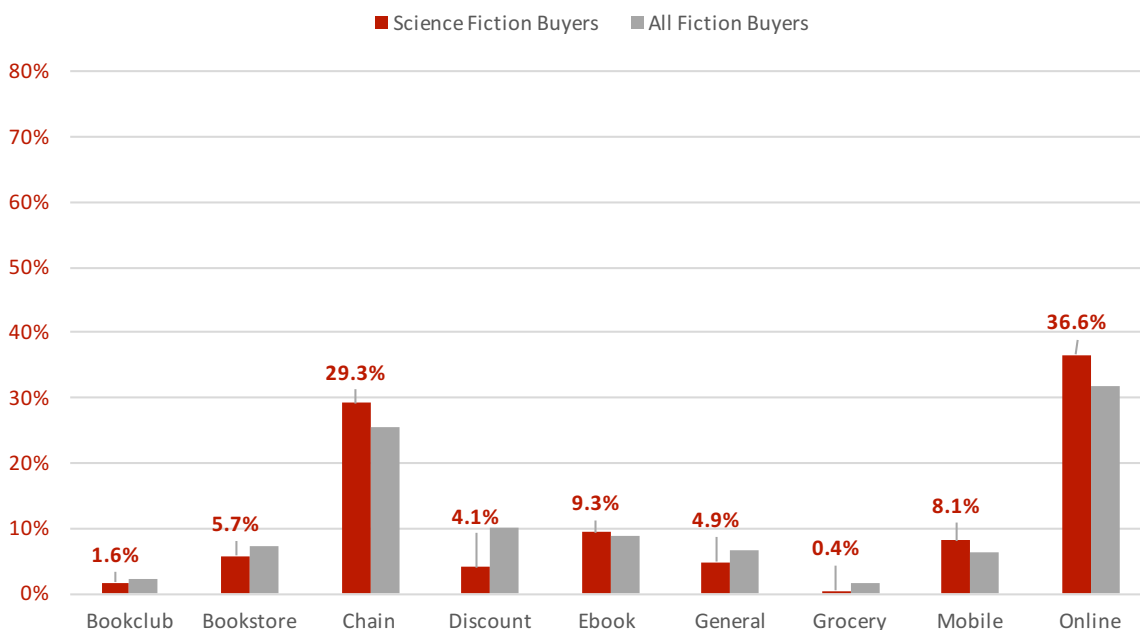
Science Fiction buyers are an orderly lot, with 33% of their purchases being fully planned. This means that they not only plan to buy a specific book but they also plan to purchase it at a specific time. Only 16.3% of purchases were fully impulsive, i.e., they were not planning to buy that book, or any book, at the time of purchase.

Impulse vs. Planned Purchase



Which of the following best describes your decision to buy this specific book at that time? (N=233)

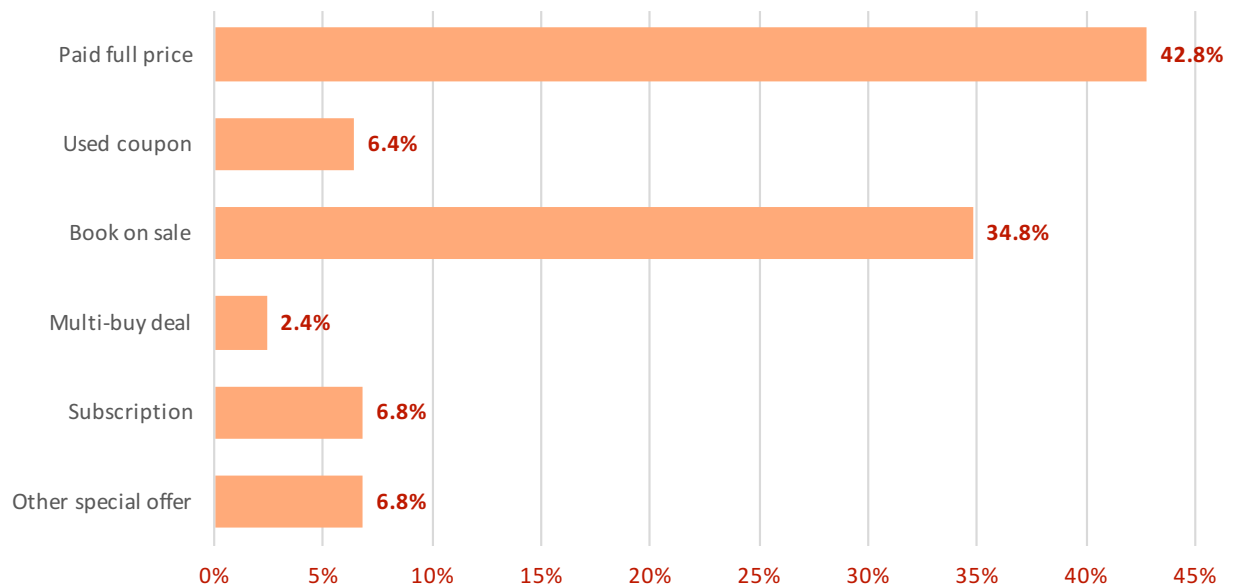
Purchase by Channel



How would you describe where you bought this book? (N=246, N=4,356)

A higher than average number of Science Fiction buyers obtained their books through a subscription — 6.9% as compared to 4.6% for the average Fiction buyer — which likely ties into the tendency of these readers to acquire materials digitally.

Discounted Pricing



Did you buy the book at full price or did you buy it at a special price or offer? (N=250)

When asked if they thought the book they purchased was a good value, Science Fiction buyers said 54% of their purchases were excellent value. This is the second-lowest percentage of “excellent” ratings among all the Fiction categories (with only Fantasy ranking lower). Meanwhile, 44% found their purchase to be “good” value, which was the highest number of all Fiction subjects in the Deep Dive series.

Using BiblioShare, BookNet Canada’s bibliographic database, the average list prices for Science Fiction books published in 2016, broken out by format, are as follows:

List Price

Hardcover	Paperback	Ebook	Audiobook
\$35.26	\$17.56	\$10.64	\$22.67

When we asked respondents what price they paid for their Science Fiction books, we found that most prices were notably reduced from the list prices above. One exception is ebooks, which was about on par with the list price. Two things to keep in mind are: 1) these numbers are based on buyers' potentially unreliable recollections of what they paid, and 2) retailers often offer consumers discounts off the full retail/list price.

Selling Price

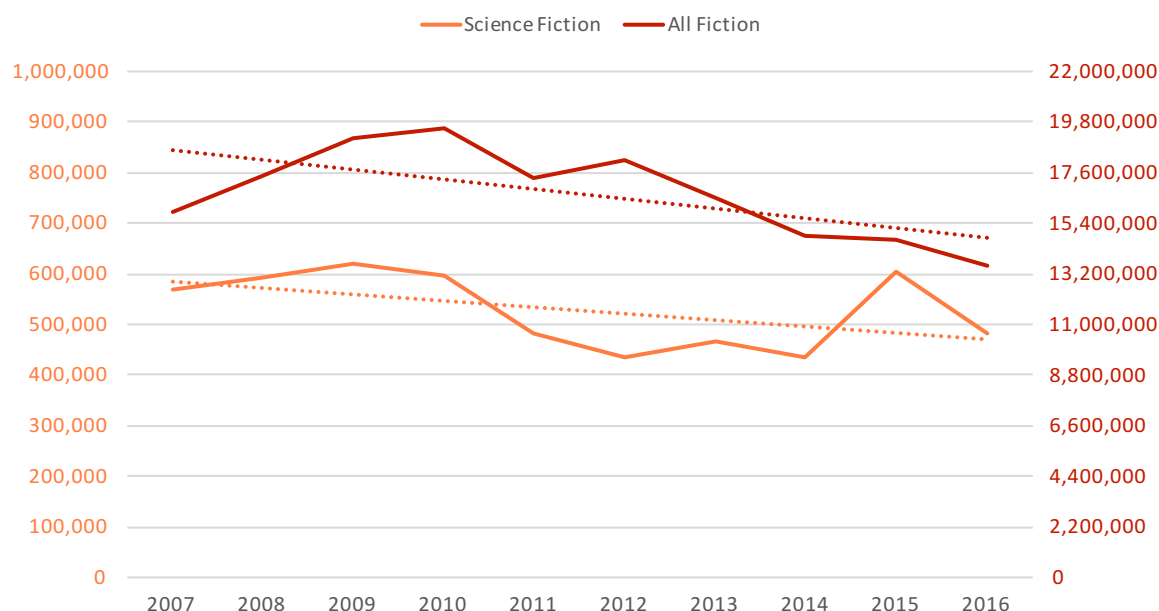
Hardcover	Paperback	Ebook	Audiobook
\$20.14	\$11.24	\$10.01	\$10.20

How much did you pay for this book (before tax)? (N=249)

Sales Analysis of the Science Fiction Category

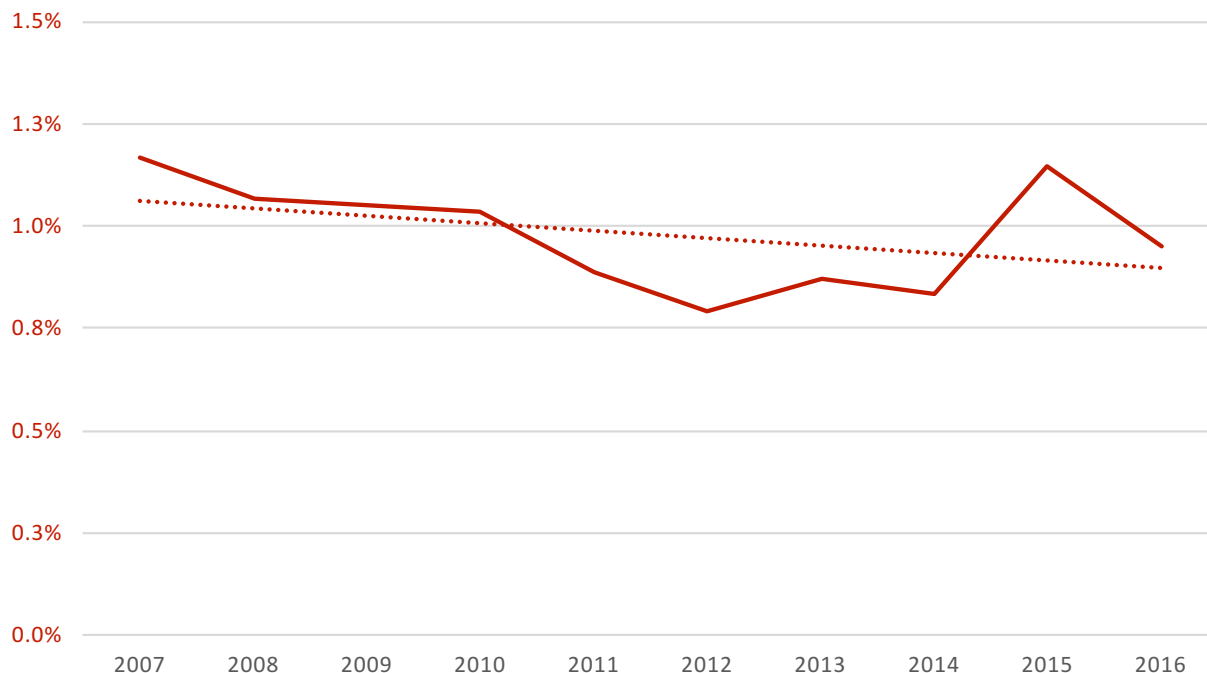
BNC SalesData has tracked the sale of print books in the trade market for more than 10 years. During this time, sales in the Science Fiction category have declined slightly, about on par with the overall Fiction market.

Volume Sold



Market share looks at the percentage of the market “owned” by a particular category. Over the last 10 years, we are seeing only a slight decline in the Science Fiction market share.

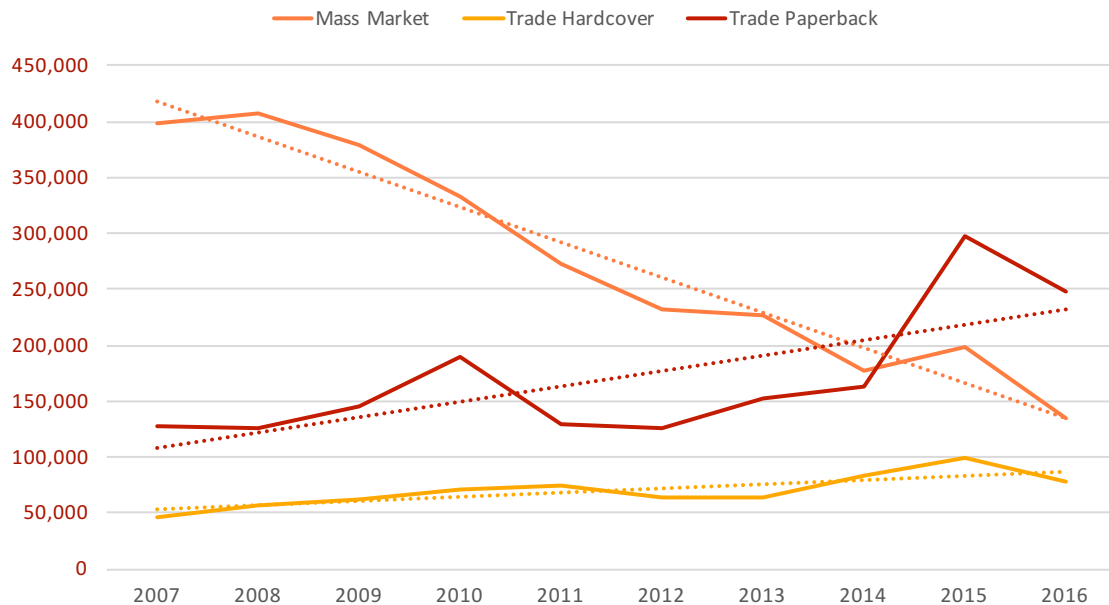
Market Share



When it comes to breaking down sales by format over the past 10 years, we find a substantial decline in mass market. Though BNC SalesData does not track the sale of ebooks, we can make an educated guess from looking at consumer data and talking to publishers of Science Fiction books that much of the mass market format has shifted to digital (i.e., ebooks). Canadian consumers really began purchasing ebooks in 2009/2010, and much of this purchasing has been focused in the ‘genre’ fiction subjects: Mystery, Romance, Fantasy, and Science Fiction.

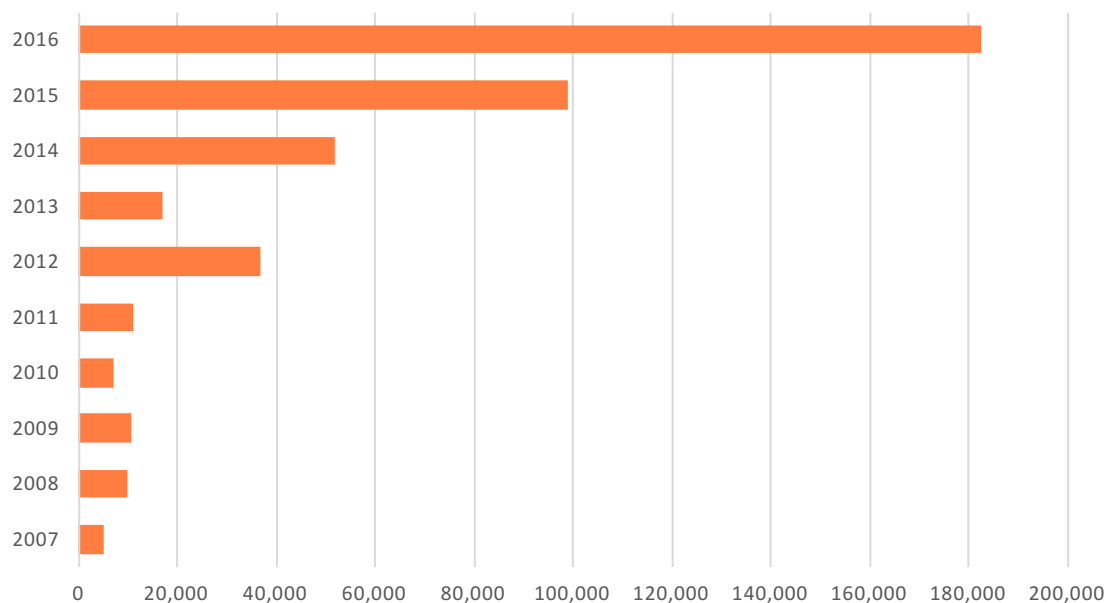
We are also seeing increases in trade paperback sales with a substantial increase in 2015, a lot of which can be attributed to the success of *The Martian*.

Sales by Format



The graph below breaks out overall sales by year of publication. This allows us to take a look at how a category may be either frontlist or backlist heavy. In the case of Science Fiction, sales of 2016 titles rank significantly higher than those for any other year — demonstrating a proclivity for frontlist titles unmatched by any other category. Additionally, we can see that titles with publication dates between 2007 and 2010 are selling at a much slower rate.

Volume of Titles Selling in 2016 by Publication Year



The top 10 bestselling Science Fiction authors in Canada for 2015-2016 are:

1. Andy Weir
2. Ernest Cline
3. Brian K. Vaughan
4. Pierce Brown
5. James S. A. Corey
6. Orson Scott Card
7. Chuck Wendig
8. Ian Doescher
9. Isaac Asimov
10. Neal Stephenson

Perennial bestsellers refer not to the top-selling books (i.e., books that have sold the most) but rather the most consistent bestsellers, year over year. The perennial bestsellers listed here were identified by searching for titles that ranked well every year from 2013 to 2016. If you are building a Science Fiction section in a bookstore, these are the tried and true titles from the last four years. To be included on this list, a Science Fiction title had to rank within the top 300 for each of the four years—a rank threshold that was determined by how widely we had to search to compile a list of 30 titles.

Top 30 Perennial Bestsellers

Title	Contributor	ISBN	Publisher	Binding	List Price	Pub Date
William Shakespeare's Star Wars	Doescher, Ian	9781594746376	Quirk Books	HT	\$15.95	02-07-2013
Ender's Game	Card, Orson Scott	9780812550702	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$9.99	15-07-1994
Ender's Game	Card, Orson Scott	9780765370624	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$9.99	01-10-2013
Speaker for the Dead	Card, Orson Scott	9780812550757	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$9.99	15-08-1994
Gardens of the Moon	Erikson, Steven	9780553819571	Transworld Publishers Ltd	TP	\$13.99	04-03-2008
Necronomicon	Lovecraft, H. P.	9780575081574	Orion Publishing Group, Ltd	TP	\$32.95	27-03-2008
Redshirts	Scalzi, John	9780765334794	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	TP	\$18.50	15-01-2013
Saga	Vaughan, Brian K.	9781607066927	Image Comics	TP	\$19.99	02-07-2013
Xenocide	Card, Orson Scott	9780812509250	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	15-08-1992

Top 30 Perennial Bestsellers continued

Title	Contributor	ISBN	Publisher	Binding	List Price	Pub Date
2312	Robinson, Kim Stanley	9780316098113	Little Brown & Co	MM	\$13.00	25-06-2013
Earth Unaware	Card, Orson Scott; Johnston, Aaron	9780765367365	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	30-04-2013
Ender in Exile	Card, Orson Scott	9780765344151	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	29-12-2009
The Windup Girl	Bacigalupi, Paolo	9781597801584	Skyhorse Publishing Company, Inc	TP	\$24.99	01-05-2010
Ender's Shadow	Card, Orson Scott	9780812575712	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	15-12-2000
Darth Plagueis	Luceno, James	9780345511294	Random House	MM	\$9.99	30-10-2012
Children of the Mind	Card, Orson Scott	9780812522396	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	15-06-1997
Feed	Grant, Mira	9780316081054	Little Brown & Co	MM	\$12.00	01-05-2010
Revan	Karpyshyn, Drew	9780345511355	Random House	MM	\$10.49	25-09-2012
BioShock: Rapture	Shirley, John	9780765367358	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	26-06-2012
Foundation	Asimov, Isaac	9780553293357	Random House	MM	\$11.99	01-10-1991
Neuromancer	Gibson, William	9780441569595	Penguin Publishing	MM	\$11.99	15-08-1986
The Thursday War	Traviss, Karen	9780765370396	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	27-08-2013
Snow Crash	Stephenson, Neal	9780553380958	Random House	TP	\$21.00	02-05-2000
Halo: the Fall of Reach	Nylund, Eric	9780765367297	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	MM	\$10.99	28-06-2011
Seeds of Earth	Cobley, Michael	9780316213981	Little Brown & Co	MM	\$12.00	25-09-2012
Neuromancer	Gibson, William; Womack, Jack	9780441007462	Penguin Publishing	TP	\$23.00	01-07-2000
Lost Tribe of the Sith	Miller, John Jackson	9780345541321	Random House	TP	\$19.00	24-07-2012
Deceived	Kemp, Paul S.	9780345511393	Random House	MM	\$9.99	29-05-2012
Annihilation: Star Wars (the Old Republic)	Karpyshyn, Drew	9780345529428	Random House	MM	\$10.49	29-10-2013
The Halo	Nylund, Eric; Dietz, William C.	9780765370129	Tom Doherty Associates, LLC	POS materials	\$31.97	28-08-2012